

E 474

.92

.J79



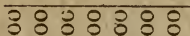
Class E 474

Book . 92

PRESENTED BY
J 79

The Battle of Prairie Grove,

December 7, 1862



**By SAMUEL JONES,
Formerly Major-General,
C. S. Army.**

E474

92

.J79

The Battle of Prairie Grove, Dec. 7, 1862.

[The following account of the battle of Prairie Grove is taken from the Southern Bivouac, published at Louisville, Ky., and was written by Samuel Jones, Formerly Major-General, C. S. Army.]

On Sunday, the 7th day of December, 1862, in Washington County, in the northwestern part of Arkansas, and near the Indian Territory, an engagement took place between the Union and Confederate forces called the "Battle of Fayetteville" or "Illinois Creek," but which is better known as the "Battle of Prairie Grove," which had an important bearing on subsequent military operations in the Trans-Mississippi part of the country.

There are on file in the War Department in Washington forty official reports and congratulatory addresses to the troops, written by officers engaged purporting to give correct statements of the battle and the preliminary movements and skirmishes. Thirty-one of these documents are by Union and nine by Confederate officers.

With such a mass of official informa

tion available, it would seem that a clear and truthful history of the battle might readily be written; yet so obscure, confused, and contradictory are these official records, that it is impossible to write an intelligible and accurate narrative of the engagement which shall be consistent in itself and with the official records.

Discrepancies as to the particulars of a battle naturally occur in the reports from the different sides. Even when no strong influences operate on the writers to give a descriptive tone and coloring to their reports, the fact that they view the engagement from different standpoints, and that no observer can see all that is passing over an extensive field, may very naturally lead them into conflicting statements. In this instance, however, the differences are unusually wide and radical.

For instance, General Thomas C. Hindman, commanding the Confederate forces, states that he carried into the engagement less than ten thousand men of all arms. He estimated the enemy's force at from fourteen thousand to eighteen thousand, with sixty pieces of artillery; and their losses to have been about 1,900, while his own



Gift
U. S. C. Arkansas
Oct. 9. 19

were 1,317. General James G. Blunt, commanding the Union forces, says he had in the engagement only seven thousand men; that General Hindman admitted his own force in the engagement to have been twenty-eight thousand; that the Confederate loss, in killed on the field was 1,000, and the wounded exceeded 2,000 (General Heron, next to Blunt in rank on the Union side, thinks the Confederate loss in all will reach from 5,000 to 8,000), while his own total loss in kill, wounded, and missing was only 1,148. Both Generals Hindman and Blunt, when in conversation under flag of truce the day after the battle seem, with much frankness, to have admitted defeat—and yet in official reports General Hindman states that at the close of the engagement the enemy fled beyond the prairie, and he adds: "At dark the battle closed, leaving us masters of every foot of ground on which it was fought."

On the other hand, General Blunt reports officially that both General Marmaduke (now Governor of Missouri) and General Hindman "acknowledged to me in an interview under flag of truce that they had been well whipped," and in an address to his troops

five days after the battle he congratulates them on having gained in that battle complete success and a brilliant victory, and adds: "No battle during the present war has been more determined and bloody, and never was there a field upon which, considering the number of troops engaged, and the time occupied, the slaughter was as great."

Even the minor incidents preceding an engagement are greatly magnified—not to use a stronger term. General Marmaduke mentions that on the fifth two of his advancing brigades engaged the enemy's pickets and drove them back, whereas General Blunt reports that on the same day his pickets encountered the enemy in vastly superior numbers and drove them six miles into the mountains.

It is impossible to wholly reconcile such contradictory statements. Nevertheless, when divested of redundant exaggeration and vain boasting, and when the residuum is clearly analyzed, the reports disclose the salient and most important incidents of a well-contested and unusually bloody engagement, in which the numbers engaged and the losses sustained were

strikingly near equality, and which, with some notable exceptions, was highly creditable to the endurance and valor of the troops engaged.

On the 3rd of December, 1862, the First division, Brigadier-General James G. Blunt commanding, of the Army of the Frontier was on Cane Hill, about twelve miles southwest of Fayetteville, in the northwestern part of Arkansas. The Second and Third divisions of the same army, both divisions commanded by Brigadier-General Herron, were *en echelon* from Wilson's Creek, Missouri, about one hundred miles from Fayetteville, toward the latter place. In the absence of Major-General Schofield, Brigadier-General Blunt was in command of the Army of the Frontier.

On the same date the First corps of the Trans-Mississippi Army, Major-General Thomas C. Hindman commanding, was in the vicinity of Van Buren, Arkansas. That section of country was destitute of food, and the Arkansas River was too low for navigation. The scant rations for the men and forage for the cavalry horses and draft animals was hauled about eighty miles to their camps. General Hind-

man was convinced that it would very soon be necessary to move the greater part of his command to the vicinity of Little Rock to subsist it. But it would not be safe to leave a small force near Van Buren while the enemy occupied Cane Hill in force. Knowing that one division, the First, estimated at from seven to eight thousand men, with thirty pieces of artillery, occupied Cane Hill, and that the other two divisions of the Army of the Frontier were from seventy to one hundred miles away to the north, General Hindman determined to attack the First division at Cane Hill and destroy or drive it off before it could be joined by the Second and Third divisions.

Cane Hill is a ridge of about eight miles in length by about five in width in the southwestern part of Washington County, Arkansas, and just beyond the northern base of Boston Mountain. There are three villages, Russellville, Boonsborough, and Newburg, merging into each other and stretching from three to five miles along the ridge road to Fayetteville. The main body of the Union force, under General Blunt, was in and around Newburg.

The distance from Van Buren to Newburg is forty-five miles. The intermediate country is a rugged and sterile range of mountains. The four principal roads across those mountains diverging from Van Buren converge on Fayetteville. One of these roads bending to the east and following Frog Bayou, crosses the mountains, then following the west fork of White River, enters Fayetteville from the south-east; another, called the telegraph road, runs generally upon mountain ridges directly northward; a third branching off from the telegraph road about twelve miles from Van Buren, follows the Cherokee line to Evansville, thence north by Cincinnati and Maysville to Fort Scott. From Evansville there is a road through the Cane Hill country to Fayetteville. At Olivers, nineteen miles from Van Buren on the telegraph road, another branch road turns off to the left, following the valley of Cove Creek to the base of the mountains, and after crossing them, passing through a succession of defiles, valleys, and prairies, enters Fayetteville from the south-west. At Morrows, fifteen miles north of Olivers, a branch of the Cove Creek

road starts and leads directly to Newburg, seven miles distant. Eight miles above Morrows the Cove Creek road is crossed by another leading from Hog Eye, five miles to the east on the telegraph road, directly to Newburg. Two miles further on a branch road leads by Rhea's Mill to Maysville, and crosses the Cane Hill and Fayetteville road two miles from the Cove Creek road at a point seven and a half miles from Newburg, twelve and a half miles from Fayetteville, and two and a half miles from the junction of the Cove Creek with the Cane Hill and Fayetteville roads. The distance from Van Buren to Fayetteville is fifty miles by the shortest and sixty-five by the longest of these roads.

Having, with difficulty and much labor, accumulated half rations for seven days, General Hindman moved northward on the 3rd of December, with nine thousand infantry, two thousand and three hundred cavalry, and twenty-two pieces of artillery. Lack of shoes and arms prevented him from taking his entire force. He expected, and so stated in a dispatch to the Department Commander, to return to the vicinity of Van Buren immediately

after the engagement he was seeking, because he had barely ammunition enough for a single battle, and but scant subsistence and forage for seven days on half rations.

General Marmaduke's cavalry division of three brigades, Shelley's, MacDonald's, and Carol's, which was already well advanced northward, moved in advance from Dripping Springs. Shelley's brigade of about eleven hundred men followed the Cove Creek road, MacDonald's, of about seven hundred men, the telegraph road, and Carol's, reduced to about five hundred effective, and commanded by Colonel Monroe, moved on the most westerly road which nearly follows the line of the Creek or Indian Nation. Colonel Watts with his Cherokee regiment was ordered to Evansville, with instructions when he heard the firing to move forward and occupy certain mills in the Cane Hill country, and attack the enemy's trains should they, as was anticipated, retreat in that direction.

The two infantry divisions under Generals Shoup and Frost marched on the telegraph road and bivouacked at Oliver's on the night of the 4th. There news was received that Gener-

al Blunt had been reinforced by three thousand or four thousand men. It was not until the 6th that the infantry reached Morrows. It will be seen that the march was excessively slow, thirty-four miles from the 3rd to the 6th, due to the bad condition of the roads and the draft animals, and to "some of those apparently unavoidable delays to which troops so ill-provided as ours are liable," says General Hindman.

On the 5th, Colonel Monroe's small cavalry brigade marched across and joined Shelley's brigade on the Cove Creek road, both brigades moving on the latter, while MacDonald pressed forward on the telegraph road. During the day Colonel Shelley's advance encountered a large scouting party of the enemy, which made a bold bash at the advancing foe, but Colonel Jean's Second Missouri Cavalry met and drove them several miles back. At night Shelley came upon a strong outpost occupied by the Second Kansas cavalry at the junction of the Cane Hill and Cove Creek roads.

Before day-dawn on the 6th, Shelley threw his brigade, dismounted, on the Second Kansas, which, after a highly

creditable stand against superior numbers, retired and was pursued to within two miles of the main body of the First division, at Newburg. There, from the crest of the mountain to its base, about sunset, a sharp combat occurred, in which Colonel I. C. Monroe and his brigade of Arkansas cavalry who had relieved Colonel Shelley greatly distinguished themselves. Colonel Hunter's regiment of Missouri infantry of Parson's brigade of Frost's division soon occupied the ground which Colonel Monroe's cavalry had gained, and was joined there by the remainder of Parson's brigade to hold the heights and defiles. Thus, as the night of the 6th set in, the Confederates were in full possession of the Cove Creek road above and below its junction with the Cane Hill road, the greater part massed close to the Union outposts.

On the morning of the 3rd, General Blunt telegraphed General Herron, near Wilson's Creek, Missouri, of Hindman's advance, and ordered him to hasten with all speed by forced marches to join him, and especially to hasten forward his cavalry, which was in advance near Cassville. These or-

ders were promptly obeyed, and the march was made with rapidity and endurance highly creditable to the troops.

The advance Federal cavalry was in supporting distance of General Blunt on the 5th. The rear division (the Second) of infantry arrived in Fayetteville at 3 o'clock on the morning of the 7th, and the commander, Colonel Dye (at present Chief of Police of the District of Columbia), being then informed of the urgent need of the junction of his division with General Blunt's, hastened forward without rest or food.

The prompt and rapid march of the Second and Third to join the First division had snatched from General Hindman the chance of attacking the First division alone.

On the night of the 6th General Hindman called all of his general officers together for consultation, and informing them that information had reached him that General Herron, with two divisions, was then at or near Fayetteville and hastening to form a junction with General Blunt, desired their opinions as to the best course to pursue. The Confederate force was

at that time on the Cane Hill road, and six or seven miles distant from the mass of Blount's force. The Confederate commander had no time for hesitation or delay. He had started on the expedition with but half rations for seven days, and was then at the close of the fourth day. To withdraw without fighting at all would probably demoralize his troops and perhaps embolden the enemy to follow and force an engagement under even greater disadvantages than then confronted him.

Near the point where the troops were then bivouacked there was another road leading off to the right which, after crossing the mountain ridge, came into the road in rear of Cane Hill, upon which Herron was approaching. There was a possibility that by leaving a small and aggressive force in General Blunt's front, to occupy his attention and produce the impression that he was to be attacked in front in force, Hindman could, by taking this last mentioned road, throw the main body of his force against Herron, then known to be marching from Fayetteville toward Cane Hill, defeat and disperse his command, and then turn upon and engage Blunt on equal terms.

General Marmaduke strongly advocated this plan. With two supporting divisions so near him General Blunt, if attacked in front, would in all probability withdraw northward to hasten a junction with General Herron, and thus by their combined force turn the balance of probabilities of success decidedly against the Confederates.

General Shoup on the other hand as strongly urged that they should move promptly forward on the direct road, so as to begin the attack at early dawn. The road by which it was proposed to make the detour to the rear of Cane Hill was about double as long as the one which would bring them directly upon Blunt's main body. If the detour were made, it was more than probable, from information received as to General Herron's march, that when the Confederate columns debouched into the main road in rear of Cane Hill, they would have both Blunt and Herron upon them, and the result might well prove disastrous. After mature deliberation, General Hindman decided to make the detour.

Colonel Monroe was ordered to remain on the crest of the mountain with his cavalry brigade, and at daylight

to skirmish briskly as infantry with the force in his front, to delude the enemy and detain him at Newburg as long as possible, and to push him vigorously when he commenced to retire. At midnight Colonel Parsons, after replenishing his camp-fires, moved back to Morrows. The trains were ordered by a cross-road to the telegraph road and thence to Hog Eye, guarded by one hundred cavalry and the disabled infantry, of whom there were many. Those arrangements left General Hindman less than ten thousand men of all arms to carry into the impending engagement.

The command was ordered to move forward at 3 a. m., but was not in motion until nearly 4 a. m., on the Cove Creek road and its Maysville branch to the Cane Hill and Fayetteville road. The roads were so excessively bad and the battery horses so reduced and debilitated that the two infantry divisions did not march more than two miles per hour. Marmaduke's cavalry moved with more speed on the Cove Creek road.

General Blunt, ascertaining on the morning of the 7th that the Confederate commander had left only a small

force, Monroe's cavalry, to engage his attention in front while the main force was making a flank march to his left to intercept and engage General Heron, then marching rapidly from Fayetteville toward Cane Hill, dispatched his train, guarded by the Third Indiana regiment, on the road to Rhea's Mill; the whole of the First division, preceded by Colonel Wickersham's cavalry brigade the Third division, was ordered to move rapidly in the direction of Fayetteville to form a junction with General Herron. After marching about three miles the cavalry commander by some mistake took the road to Rhea's Mills, instead of the one to Fayetteville, and was followed by the infantry, thus defeating the purpose of forming a quick junction with General Herron.

General Marmaduke with Shelley's and MacDonald's brigade of his cavalry division reached the junction of the Cove Creek with the Cane Hill and Fayetteville road about day-dawn and there ascertained that a cavalry force was but half a mile distant in his front. Leaving a part of Shelley's brigade and Bledsoe's artillery at that point to resist the enemy coming from

either direction, he sent the remainder of that brigade forward toward Fayetteville to attack the advancing Federals in front, while MacDonald's brigade moved rapidly to attack in flank and rear.

The Federal force immediately in front was the First Arkansas (Federal) cavalry, Colonel Harrison commanding, and Seventh Missouri cavalry. Both regiments had just made forced marches, the latter having arrived and bivouacked at that point about midnight. They were unprepared and completely surprised; after a few shots many men threw down their arms and surrendered; the others fled, throwing away their arms and all that could impede their flight, and, hotly pursued by MacDonald's two regiments, Young's and Crump's. General Herron's advance guard, the First battalion, First Missouri cavalry, was unable to stem the torrent of fugitives, and in attempting to check the pursuit were severely handled, losing the commander, Major Hubbard, captured. The pursuit was continued four or five miles, to within six miles of Fayetteville, where the main column of the Federal forces was met. "It

was with great difficulty," says General Herron, "that we got them (the flying cavalrýmen) checked, and prevented a general stampede of the battery horses; but, after some hard talking and my finally shooting one cowardly whelp off his horse, they halted."

Colonel Harrison, who had reached the point where he was surprised by the enemy, had reported to General Blunt that his regiment was so exhausted that he could not march before Monday the 8th.

"Whether his regard for the Sabbath or the fear of getting into a fight prompted him to make such a report to me, I am unable to say; but judging from his movements that he was not a man upon whom to place much reliance on the battlefield. I ordered him to proceed by daybreak to Rhea's Mills to guard the transportation and supply trains at that point, the first brigade having been ordered to join me at Cane Hill. Had he, instead of making unnecessary delay, promptly obeyed that order, he would not have had a part of his command and transportation captured by General Marmaduke's advance, as occurred on the morning of the 7th."

In the headlong fight and pursuit the Confederates captured about two hundred prisoners, five hundred rifles and small arms, forty wagons and teams with blankets and all manner of army clothing and commissary stores, which were promptly secured and sent to the rear. General Herron's infantry and artillery soon arrested Marmaduke's pursuits, who, finding himself in the face of the main body of the enemy, drew off his cavalry and fell back across Illinois Creek to join the infantry divisions of the Confederate force, closely followed by General Herron.

In the meantime, from 4 to 11 o'clock in the morning, the divisions of Generals Shoup and Frost were toiling over bad roads, so exhausted from lack of food it would seem that though rapidity of march was essential to success, they had marched but fifteen miles in seven days. They had been on half rations for more than a month, had eaten nothing since the day before, and many, overcome by fatigue, had fallen by the roadside.

General Shoup, who commanded the leading division, finding that General Marmaduke was falling back before

the enemy's infantry, placed his division in position to meet an expected attack. He had with admirable judgment selected a strong defensive position, which gave the name to the engagement that followed.

It was upon the brow of a densely wooded hill, descending abruptly to Crawford's Prairie, half a mile in width, encircling the northern half of the hill; three quarters of a mile to the north, and between the hill and the advancing enemy, ran Illinois Creek, easily fordable but thickly bordered. Five hundred yards in rear to the south of the hill was another prairie. Between the two prairies on the right and left were skirts of woods connecting the timber of the hill with that beyond. On the summit of the hill was Prairie Grove Church. The Cane Hill and Fayetteville road traverses the middle line of this hill, passing by the church, where it is crossed by another road connecting the Cane Hill and Fayetteville with the Cove Creek road, dividing the south prairie from the timber upon the hill. This position had been reached by the Confederates about 1 o'clock a. m., too late to engage General Her-

ron's command alone, as had been designed.

"The interval of time in which I might have attacked Herron was past. Circumstances did not permit me to avail myself of it for the manifest reason that at the favorable moment the rear of my column could not be where the head of it was."

Finding himself between Blunt and Herron, the former four or five miles to the left and rear, the latter a mile or two in front and advancing, Hindman, in a brief conference, had been advised by General Shoup to leave as small a force as could be relied on to hold the strong position about Prairie Grove Church against Herron, and as quickly as possible turn and throw the main body againsts Blunt; and when asked what force could probably hold Herron in check, Shoup replied that he thought he could do it with his two brigades, new conscripts though they were. He was directed to undertake it, and immediately proceeded to make his dispositions accordingly, under the impression that the main body would move against Blunt. Hindman seems, however, to have changed his mind, and passing from the aggressive to the

defensive attitude, decided to receive both Blunt and Herron at and about Prairie Grove. The shape of the hill determined the line of battle, which was nearly in the form of a horseshoe. Shoup, who supposed his division alone was to receive Herron's attack, ordered up his only battery to sweep the ford over the little stream which Herron's advance guard had just reached, placed Fagan's brigade along the crest of the hill and held the other brigade *en echelon* in the rear to aid in the attack on Blunt, if necessary, or as a second line to hold Herron, if Fagan's brigade should not be able to withstand the attack. The troops were carefully instructed, and had it impressed upon them to reserve their fire until the enemy approached to within short and effective range, and having delivered their fire deliberately, not to stand and receive, but to spring forward and meet every charge, and these instructions were admirably obeyed. Shelley's brigade, dismounted, occupied the center of the line on Shoup's left; his and Shoup's commands confronting Herron, who was rapidly forming on a bluff beyond the prairie to the north. Frost's division,

to which had been added the brigade of Texans, with Clark's Missouri regiment, commanded by Brigadier-General Roane, was held in reserve. MacDonald's brigade, composed of his own regiment of Missouri cavalry, Lieutenant-Colonel M. L. Young, commanding, and Lane's regiment of Texas cavalry, Lieutenant-Colonel R. P. Crump commanding, was held in readiness to meet any attempt to turn either flank.

To feel the Confederate position, Herron ordered a section of Battery E, First Missouri light artillery, supported by the Ninety-fourth Illinois infantry, to cross the creek on the main road and open fire, but the ford was within range of the Confederate guns, which quickly caused the section and its support to re-cross the creek. Convinced that Hindman's whole force was immediately in front of him, Herron decided to attack immediately, rightly conjecturing that his fire would draw Blunt to his support.

To cover the passage of the creek on the main road, Colonel Houston, commanding the second division, cut a passage through the timber to the

creek half a mile from the road, and carried across Battery F (Murphy's) First Missouri light artillery of six guns, three of which, under Lieutenant Marr, took a commanding position in the open field; the other three, under Captain Murphy, took a more elevated position about four hundred yards to the right, the Thirty-seventh Illinois infantry supporting the half battery on the right, the Twentieth Iowa that on the left, the Twenty-sixth Indiana infantry in reserve. About midday a rapid and well-aimed fire from these guns drew the Confederate fire upon them, and under cover of it three other batteries—Captain Backof's, and Lieutenants Foust's and Borries'—supported by the Nineteenth Iowa, Twentieth Wisconsin, and Ninety-fourth Illinois infantry, passed over the creek, and soon the twenty-four field-pieces were in active play on the Confederate position, and continued for about an hour. In that time, says Herron, the Confederate batteries were silenced; but Hindman says he ordered his guns to cease firing, it would seem, to tempt the enemy to assault his position. If that was his object, it succeeded. The second division, under

Colonel Huston, and third, under General Herron in person, were in line of battle. The second brigade, third division, Colonel Orme commanding, was moved to the left to meet what seemed a threatened attack on that flank. The advance of the infantry and artillery across the broad open field was made with admirable steadiness, winning the admiration of their enemy—the artillery, which was excellent, firing rapidly and with telling effect while advancing. When within a hundred yards of the ridge the Twentieth Wisconsin and Nineteenth Iowa of Colonel Bertram's brigade were ordered to charge a battery in position near a farm house. The charge was handsomely made, the battery captured and the two regiments passed on to the crest of the ridge. They were permitted to approach to within sixty or seventy yards of the line when Fagan's Arkansas brigade, a part of McRae's and the Missourians under Shelley opened a withering fire from their rifles, muskets, and shot-guns, then sprang forward in a counter-charge, drove the enemy back and pursued them far into the prairie until checked by the effect-

ive fire of the Union batteries. Colonel Hawthorn's Arkansas regiment recaptured the battery which had been taken in charge. The slaughter in this charge and counter-charge was very great—the ground was thickly strewn with the killed and wounded, among the killed being Colonel McFarland commanding the Nineteenth Iowa. Colonel Huston having been ordered to support the infantry of the third division in the charge, led in person the Twenty-sixth Indiana and Thirty-seventh Illinois at double-quick. Finding the column of the third division which had just been repulsed so badly cut up as to need time to re-form, he led his two regiments up the hill to assail the Confederates in position. This line, like the first, was permitted to approach to within seventy-five or one hundred yards, when Shoup's infantry, which was lying down, concealed by thick undergrowth, rose and poured a most destructive fire into the advancing line which withstood and returned it with admirable steadiness for a few minutes, then fell back in confusion, but reformed beyond musket range from the foot of the hill where it remained to the close of the

action. The two regiments had lost nearly a third of their numbers in killed and wounded. The Twenty-sixth Indiana lost nearly one half of the number carried into action.

General Blunt, with the first division, was at or near Rhea's Mills, about five miles to the west from the field of battle, when he heard the rapid artillery-firing with which the engagement opened. Leaving the first brigade of his division to guard the trains at Rhea's Mills, he immediately marched with the second and third brigades, by an obscure road, to the sound of the guns, and arrived on the field about 2 o'clock. Entering by the western extremity of the prairie, he formed line of battle about two thousand yards distant from the Confederate line. The left of his line connected with Colonel Dye's brigade, the second brigade, second division, which was on the right of Herron's command. The arrival of the first division inspired with new spirit the two other divisions which, greatly exhausted by long forced marches, had already lost heavily in the two unsuccessful assaults.

Rabb's, Terry's, and Hopkin's batteries, of six pieces each, were quickly

placed in position, and in concert with Herron's three batteries twenty-four guns opened a rapid and destructive fire, the prelude to an advance of the infantry along the whole Union line. The well-known military principle, that with new troops the proportion of artillery to the other arms of service should be much increased, was strikingly exemplified in this engagement. From its beginning to its end, the Union artillery, which seems to have been excellent, and admirably served, played a most conspicuous part, and, as may be gathered from the official reports, saved the Union army from disastrous defeat. The Confederate artillery, on the contrary, was very inferior and did not play a conspicuous part in the engagement.

When Blunt's force appeared on the field, Frost's division, till now held in reserve, was thrown in on Shelley's left to meet it. Its movement into position was much impeded by the dense undergrowth and the destructive artillery-fire. Under cover of this fire the infantry advanced along the whole line, General Herron renewed his assault on Shoup's position, which had been so tenaciously held, and the

troops under General Blunts immediate command were thrown forward into the woods and engaged Frost's division. Colonel Weir led the Tenth and Thirteenth Kansas regiments of his brigade upon the right. A part of the Second Kansas cavalry, dismounted, under Captain Crawford, the right wing of the Eleventh Kansas infantry under Colonel Ewing, and the First Indian regiment under Colonel Wattles, upon the left. The Twentieth Iowa, of Colonel Dye's brigade of the second division, was led by Colonel Dye himself on the left of the Indians. The left wing of the Eleventh Kansas Infantry, Lieutenant-Colonel Moonlight commanding, supported Rabb's and Hopkin's batteries. Colonel Wickersham's cavalry viz., the First Iowa, Tenth Illinois, Eighth Missouri, Third Wisconsin, and the first battalion of the Second Wisconsin, were on the extreme right of the Union line to watch any movement against that flank, and guard the road leading to the supply train at Rhea's Mill. By 3 o'clock the whole infantry force and part of the dismounted cavalry, and forty-two field-pieces of the Army of the Frontier were hotly engaged, and

so continued for three hours. The last assault upon Shoup's position was most determined, and succeeded in gaining the crest of the ridge and in driving his right some distance back; but when the assailants emerged from the wood into an open space near a small cabin the Confederate fire became too sure and deadly to be withstood. The advancing line wavered, broke, and retired, and was not again rallied. The loss on this part of the field was especially heavy, and such as men who had served in the most sanguinary battles of the war up to that time had never before witnessed.

The Federal and Confederate accounts of this conflict of three hours duration are exceedingly confused.

"The contest by this time (about 3 p. m.)" says General Blunt, "had become vigorous and determined. The entire infantry of the three divisions, and also a portion of the Second Kansas (dismounted), were engaged in the woods with the rebel infantry, three times their number. The rattle of musketry, uninterrupted for fully three hours, was terrific. The contending armies swayed to and fro, each alternately advancing and retir-

ing While the infantry was vigorously contesting every inch of ground, I directed Lieutenant Stoner, with two twelve-pounder mountain howitzers to advance into the woods, which he promptly did, taking position on a little knoll on the right of the Eleventh Kansas; and, directing his guns across a small field where a heavy force of rebels were massed, he poured into them his canister and shell until his ammunition was exhausted and his horses shot down, being compelled to bring away his guns by hand. Lieutenant Tenny was then ordered in with his battery. From his six ten-pounder Parrott guns he opened on them with terrible effect, driving them back with great slaughter."

A little later he ordered his infantry to withdraw from the wood "in order to draw the enemy from under cover and within range of my artillery. On reaching the open field on their right just alluded to, I discovered the entire division of General Frost advanced to the edge of the timber and about two hundred yards distant. They opened upon us a fierce fire from Enfield rifles, and were in the act of

throwing down the fence to make an assault on the battery, which had no support except my own staff and body-guard, but Lieutenant Tenny with commendable promptness wheeled his guns into position, when the destructive fire of cannister and shell soon sent the rebel hordes back under cover of the wood

The enemy followed up my infantry as they retired from the wood, and with a wild shout rushed out from under cover of the trees, when the two batteries (Rabb's and Hopkins'), supported by the infantry of the Eleventh regiment, belched forth a perfect storm of canister, producing immense slaughter in the ranks and compelling them again to retire. As darkness approached, the fire, which from both artillery and musketry had been terrific and uninterrupted for over three hours, gradually ceased along the whole line, and my command bivouacked upon their arms, ready to renew the conflict at early dawn."

General Hindman, reporting the operations after Blunt's arrival on the field, says:

"Blunt had now formed line of battle two thousand yards to the front

and left of Shoup, and commenced advancing. I ordered Frost's division formed on the left of Marmaduke. The thick undergrowth on that flank rendered it difficult to execute the movement, which was further embarrassed by the well-directed and determined fire of the enemy's batteries. There was, however, no confusion. By the time Frost's division was in line the enemy was nearly across the prairie, and our skirmishers engaged his almost as soon as deployed. His attack was divided against Parson's brigade. It was fierce and prolonged, but ended in his being driven back in disorder with heavy losses. One of Marmaduke's regiments and one of Roane's (both Missourians) shared the honor of this brilliant achievement.

"The enemy now brought up all his artillery, many pieces of which were rifled, and endeavored to shake our troops by playing upon the entire line nearly an hour. Then he attacked with all his infantry, at the same time threatening the extreme left with a heavy cavalry force, and attempting to turn the right. MacDonald's Missouri cavalry defeated him in the last maneuver. Lane's Texas cavalry and

Roane's brigade deterred him from seriously assailing the left, and Shoup's division, Shelley's brigade of Marmaduke's division, and Parson's and Shaner's brigades of Frost's division, gloriously repulsed him in his desperate attack upon the lines. He again fled beyond the prairie, leaving his dead and wounded and the colors of several of his regiments in our hands besides a number of prisoners..

"A furious cannonade was kept up by the enemy until near sunset; then a last attack of his infantry was directed against the line held by Frost. This was a most determined effort to retrieve the fortunes of the day. It signally failed, and the enemy paid dearly in killed and wounded for the attempt. At dark the battle closed, leaving us masters of every foot of the ground on which it was fought."

Colonel Weir, commanding second brigade, first division, says of this three hours' engagement:

"The firing was general and very rapid with occasional lulls, during which we several times attempted to pass the brow of the hill and engage the enemy in close quarters. We were as often repulsed by the rain of bul-

lets. About dark, and while making a final attempt to pass over the brow of the hill, the enemy arose in the timber, with loud yells surrounded us on all sides, and charged. The air was thick with bullets, and nothing saved us from annihilation but the protection afforded by the brow of the hill. They must have been heavily reinforced; and so overpowering were their numbers that we were compelled to yield before the charge and fall back. At this time, about dark, Rabb's battery and Lieutenant Tenny with First Kansas battery on our right saved us from destruction. Their firing was so rapid and well directed that the enemy was compelled to fall back, and we marched from the field in good order.

It seems that on this, as on many other fields during the war, the fault was committed of attacking by detachments; sending a regiment, a brigade, a division, or a corps to do what should have been done by a brigade, a division, a corps, or the army. The Federal commanders made repeated attempts between 2 o'clock and dark to carry the Confederate position by detachments, and were as repeatedly repulsed, and were saved from com-

plete defeat or much heavier loss than they sustained by their greatly superior force of artillery, which seems to have been bravely and skillfully handled. Night put an end to the bloody conflict, the Federal forces falling back beyond range, how far does not appear, the Confederates holding their position. The ground between the two was thickly strewn with killed and wounded. General Herron reports that at one place between him and Shoup, on less than two acres of ground, lay three hundred men, Federal and Confederate, killed and wounded. General Blunt reports the Federal loss in killed, wounded, and missing as 1,148. The Confederate loss, he said, could not fall short of 3,000, and would probably exceed that number, 1,000 being killed on the ground. General Hindman reports his own loss in killed, wounded, and missing as 1,317. He estimated the Federal loss at 1,900, and claims to have capture 275 prisoners, including nine officers.

In consideration of the fact that he was in the presence of a superior force of the enemy; that his own men were without food, and his wagons thirty

miles in his rear, and could not be brought up without imminent risk of being captured; that his supply of ammunition was far below what would be necessary for another engagement, and that the battery animals were literally dying of starvation, and could not be foraged in the presence of a superior force of the enemy, General Hindman determined to retire. Retaining the main body of his cavalry to cover his front and picket the Cove Creek road two miles to the rear, he ordered his two infantry divisions to retire, and by midnight the rear-guard had passed out of hearing.

The cavalry remaining upon the field was engaged in caring for the killed and wounded and in collecting arms, which were thickly scattered over the field.

Both Generals Blunt and Herron report that their men rested on their arms during the night in readiness to resume the battle at early dawn.

Nevertheless Blunt sent Dr. Parker of his staff under flag of truce with a note to Hindman asking a suspension of hostilities, that he might care for his killed and wounded. Dr. Parker indicated twelve hours from sunrise

the next morning as the duration of the truce. To this Hindman assented most willingly, no doubt, but, not receiving an answer in writing arranging the details, sent a second note suggesting a personal meeting. In ignorance of the fact that the main body of Hindman's force had been in rapid retreat, General Blunt assented to the suggestion by a note dated at six o'clock in the morning of the 8th, and the meeting took place about ten o'clock. During the interview it was discovered that the Confederate Generals Hindman and Marmaduke with a few staff officers were in front of only a few cavalrymen who were busily engaged caring for the wounded and gathering arms. On discovering that if he had waited to send in his flag of truce until daylight the field of battle would have been his without a truce, Blunt was not a little chagrined, and some sharp controversy followed a day or two later as to the arms that were gathered on the field. About midday Hindman and Marmaduke retired with the cavalry, leaving the Union General in possession of the bloody field of Prairie Grove.

SAMUEL JONES,

Formerly Major-General, C. S. Army.





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 706 801 1

